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ABSTRACT

Vocational education has been altered to meet the needs of the growing number of adults participating in educational activities. Adult vocational education is a process by which adults prepare to enter an occupation or upgrade a present occupation. Programs and activities are designed to develop basic education skills, enhance occupational and career awareness, and support job preparation. Funds for adult vocational education generally come from three categories: public, private, and school-business cooperative programs. When designing programs, it should be kept in mind that adult learners are independent, have a reservoir of occupational experience which can serve as a resource, and have a problem-centered rather than a subject-centered orientation. Examples of programs and curriculum include: (1) teaching material developed by the Vocational-Technical Education Consortium of States (V-TECS); (2) the Performance-Based Adult Vocational Education Project (PAVE) and the Competency-Based Adult Vocational Education Project (CBAVE); and (3) the 916 Area Vo-Tech School in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Adult populations which have received special attention from federal legislation include women, the disabled, the disadvantaged, and older adults. This fact sheet includes a bibliography of six resources, most of which are available from the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) system. (DC)

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Tailoring Vocational Education to Adult Needs.

OVERVIEW: ERIC Fact Sheet No. 14.

by

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Career, and Vocational Education

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ERIC OVERVIEW

FACT SHEET No. 14

Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

TAILORING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION TO ADULT NEEDS

WHY DO WE NEED ADULT VOCATIONAL EDUCATION?

A growing number of adult-age individuals are participating in educational activities. The rapid rate of cultural and technological changes has resulted in vast amounts of new knowledge. At the same time, this accelerated rate of change has outdated many workers' amounts of leisure time. Therefore, many adults have come to realize a need for educational opportunities throughout their lives. They are now seeking additional schooling of an occupational, vocational, or technical nature.

Vocational education has been altered to meet adult needs. Federal legislation mandating service to selected adult populations, models for designing adult vocational education programs and curriculum, and support from three funding categories have enhanced this change.

ADULT VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND ADULT NEEDS

Adult vocational education is a process by which adults prepare to enter an occupation, or upgrade or update a present occupation in order to benefit themselves, their families, and their communities. Following World War II, there was a change in the traditional trend of educating only youth, and an increased awareness of the vocational education needs of adults. Cultural and technological changes and vast increases in knowledge frequently fostered a desire within adults for retraining to update skills and to stay abreast in their professional areas. In addition, several groups, including women, handicapped and disadvantaged individuals, older adults, and immigrants entering the United States, needed assistance in acquiring new or additional skills and knowledge to qualify for initial employment or to change fields. In effect, vocational education was faced with meeting the occupational needs of an ever-growing group of mobile adults who were eager to resume their involvement with learning.

The need for adult vocational education can be examined in terms of the existing vocational education system. Under this system, programs and activities are designed to develop basic education skills, to enhance occupational and career awareness, and to support job preparation. Courses in career exploration and occupational survival skills result in greater success in work. Additionally, training is provided to prepare a person for a specific job with a specific employer (inservice education in a hospital), for a specific occupation (cosmetologist), or for a group of similar occupations (building trades). Adult needs are being met by a wide range of educational services in vocational areas. An important end-result is increased employability.

FUNDING OF ADULT VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

There generally are three funding categories for adult vocational programs—public funds, private funds, and cooperative funds. Public funds in support of vocational education have often been allocated by federal legislation, as in the case of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) of 1973. Apprenticeship programs, training programs provided by the armed forces, and some state and local adult vocational programs also receive public funds. Adults are also offered unique vocational training opportunities through private and nonprofit schools, home study courses, and business and industry training programs. In many cases, private funds support such endeavors. In addition, business and industry have joined forces with vocational-technical schools, community colleges, and colleges and universities in the effort to provide employee education. Cooperatively funded programs have provided in-plant training and education for many current and prospective workers.

ADULT VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

In designing vocational programs for adults, certain characteristics of adult learners should be kept in mind. Adults tend to be independent, self-directed human beings. Therefore, they enjoy having some input into their learning endeavors. In addition, many adults have a reservoir of occupational experience that can serve as a resource in many educational activities. Finally, since adults are generally going to apply their newly acquired knowledge and skills immediately in the work place, their orientation toward learning is problem-centered rather than subject-centered.

Such needs have resulted in programs and curriculum that deal with immediate adult problems, that fit adults' own special time frames, that employ adult-oriented material, and that utilize knowledge adults have already accumulated. Examples of programs and curriculum found appropriate for use with adult vocational education students include the following:

- Teaching material developed by the Vocational-Technical Education Consortium of States (V-TECS). This consortium, formed in 1972, develops catalogs of performance objectives for many occupational areas. In addition, V-TECS identifies criterion-referenced measures and assembles performance guides for these objectives. Each catalog is composed of a series of tasks that the learner will be expected to perform on the job, and each task contains a

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performance objective, criterion-referenced measure, and a performance guide.

- The Performance-Based Adult Vocational Education Project (PAVE) and the Competency-Based Adult Vocational Education (CBAVE) Project. The Alabama State Department of Education aided in the development of both projects. The PAVE Project was developed to design and implement a system for the utilization of the V-TECS catalog for adult vocational education and was based on the premise that it is impossible to pre-determine or prearrange learning activities for the adult student as each is a unique individual who comes to the learning situation with a variety of experiences and needs. In addition to designing a model for implementing competency-based adult vocational education, the PAVE Project also developed a plan for providing inservice training for adult vocational education instructors.

  CBAVE was based on the Adult Performance Level (APL) Study, conducted in Texas. As this project involved a systematic method of designing curriculum material to fit the appropriate adult vocational education student's life skills, it, too, utilized the V-TECS catalogs. Life skills were infused into the curriculum on the basis that learning is accomplished more quickly and efficiently when specific needs are identified.

- The 916 Area Vo-Tech School in Minneapolis. The 916 Area Vo-Tech School was designed to use competency-based vocational education as the learning model. The school, which opened in 1972 as a year-round facility, utilizes adult motivation and self-direction to achieve an adult learning environment. Adult learners at the school progress at their own rate and in their own preferred learning style. In addition, learners manage their own learning and frequently assist others with their learning tasks. The school, which serves as a model for many schools throughout the country, has fifty-five competency-based training programs.

SELECTED ADULT POPULATIONS

Although a majority of the employed adult population are candidates for vocational education, several clearly defined groups have been singled out for special attention because of federal legislation affecting them. These groups include women, individuals with handicaps, and the disadvantaged. Older Americans, who currently receive few federal dollars for the purpose of employment training, will become a future target group because of their increasing numbers and changes in the retirement age.

Women are entering the labor force in increasing numbers. Although there are programs that attempt to deal with the multitudes of issues related to assisting, training, and counseling women, many women still experience a number of special employment problems. Many have been shuttled into low-paying, entry-level jobs in clerical and service industries with little prospect for advancement. Vocational education can assist women by providing training that leads to higher-paying jobs with greater opportunities for advancement.

Although the Vocational Education Acts and the U.S. Office of Education declared equal access and opportunity a national priority, large numbers of disadvantaged persons remain untouched by vocational education. In addition, the 1979 Vocational Education Civil Rights Survey revealed that only 2.3 percent of the adults enrolled in vocational education programs were individuals with handicaps. Little effort has been expended thus far to provide vocational education for either adults with handicaps or those who are termed disadvantaged.

Older Americans also represent a special challenge for vocational education. Individuals are extending their working lives for a number of social and economic reasons. Vocational education can offer training and retraining programs for those older adults who wish to reenter or remain in the work force past the normal retirement age.

SUMMARY

Adults are seeking further education and training to prepare for initial employment, to keep abreast of new developments in their professions, and to facilitate career change. Public, private, and corporate funds are being used to design and implement vocational training opportunities for adults. These adult-oriented opportunities consider all segments of the adult population, fit adult time frames, build on previous adult knowledge and experience, and utilize educational material designed especially for the adult vocational learner. Although vocational education is undergoing program and curriculum changes to provide adult training to fit adult needs, it needs to further consider the needs of special populations such as women, the disadvantaged, individuals with handicaps, and older adults.

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